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BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS--SEVEN NEEDED QUALITIES.

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A STUDY WAS MADE BY MODESTO JUNIOR COLLEGE, MODESTO, CALIFORNIA, AT THE NEW HOPE ADULT RETRAINING CENTER, PART OF THE MODESTO MULTIOCCUPATIONAL PROJECT UNDER THE MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING ACT, IN WHICH TRAINEES, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS IDENTIFIED CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TEACHER. STUDENT OPINIONS WERE OBTAINED THROUGH GROUP DISCUSSION, BRAINSTORMING, AND QUESTIONNAIRES. DEPTH INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED WITH THE TEACHERS USING A CASE HISTORY APPROACH. TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS DESCRIBED A HYPOTHETICAL TEACHER. THE STUDY SHOWED THAT MAINTAINING RESPECT FOR THE STUDENT IS OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE. THE TEACHER MUST HAVE UNDERSTANDING, FLEXIBILITY, PATIENCE, HUMOR, PRACTICALITY, CREATIVITY, AND PREPARATION. AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE DESIGNED FOR SCREENING POTENTIAL TEACHERS, CALLED FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ATTITUDE MEASUREMENT OF APPLICANT REACTION TO SET SITUATIONS AND POSITION STATEMENTS. EIGHT REFERENCES WERE INCLUDED. (JA)

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BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS: SEVEN NEEDED QUALITIES

The adult who requires basic education is usually handicapped intellectually, socially, politically and economically. He is a wasted community resource, since the condition he represents often breeds suspicion and tension, endangers democracy, slows cultural and technological progress, promotes poverty and disease. [1] One solution for this national problem lies in education and the key to education is the TEACHER.

An educational program designed to assist in solving this problem is faced with a number of questions. What kind of a person should the teacher be? Are the qualifications any different than those needed by any other teacher? Does he have to function in any particular manner? In considering present and future members of the staff, how can one identify a teacher with the desired attributes?

Study of these and other questions concerning the adult basic education teacher has been limited. Usually, it is confined to opinions such as "The basic ingredient common to teaching at any level is understanding and the desire to teach." [2] This seems reasonable, but is it based on any systematic study? Equally important, is understanding enough to be effective or the most important for that matter, and what kind of understanding is needed?

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1 _____. "Literacy Education," U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Circular No. 376, Washington, D. C., June, 1953.

2 Fay, Jean B., "Psychological Characteristics Affecting Adult Learning," Adult Leadership, December, 1964.

Pearl suggests that we need to select non-judgmental teachers who have humor and respect. [3] The Educational Policies Commission of NEA suggested that the essential teacher qualities are respect and awareness, but they perceived a somewhat different meaning of these terms than does Pearl. [4] In all, one finds a number of qualities which various authorities consider essential. Unfortunately, there is very little data available to substantiate these descriptions.

Some authors have avoided the direct question and focus their attention on specific qualities, as leadership, in the hope that it represents the needed characteristics. [5] In this way they choose a field where a great deal of research is available; however, the student does not choose the teacher as he would a leader. The qualities needed for leadership may be similar or the same as those needed by the adult basic education teacher, but this is an assumption that has not been tested. Therefore, it is no surprise that authorities such as Kreitlow make a specific plea for research at the practice level (instruction) in adult education. [6] In so doing he points out the need for action research based

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[3] Pearl, Arthur, "Disadvantaged Teenagers," NEA Journal, February, 1965.

[4] _____. "Education and the Disadvantaged American," Educational Policies Commission, National Education Association, Washington, D. C. 1962, PP. 19-20.

[5] Brunner, Edmund, et.al., "An Overview of Adult Education Research," Adult Education Association, Chicago, Illinois, 1959.

[6] Kreitlow, Burton W., "Needed Research," Review of Education Research, American Educational Research Association, Washington, D. C., June, 1965, P. 240.

upon the needs of functioning programs. Robert Luke supported this stand when he emphasized the problem of training teachers in such a way that one can "involve in educational programs individuals who have been alienated from society." [7] In order to achieve this goal a certain kind of teacher is required. Furthermore, this requirement becomes clearer when one realizes that America has some 8,000,000 functional illiterates plus 15,000,000 adults with less than an eighth grade education. [8] Although our colleges and universities offer a variety of educational and teacher training programs for teachers in other educational fields, very little work has been done with teachers of adults. To facilitate such programs there is a need for factual evidence about teachers in adult basic education programs. Because of this need a descriptive study was initiated by Modesto Junior College at the New Hope Adult Retraining Center.

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7 Luke, Robert A., Speaking at the Western States Regional Conference on Adult Basic Education, San Francisco, California, January 6, 1966.

8 _____. "Educationally Deficient Adults," U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Washington, D. C., 1965.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical basis for identifying the essential qualities of the adult basic education teacher. Existing programs have clearly indicated that they need such information in order to select teachers who have a high potential for successful performance. In order to meet this need, a systematic study was initiated with the following objectives:

1. To identify those characteristics which students, teachers and administrators considered essential for an effective adult basic education instructor.
2. To define through a practical context each of the characteristics.
3. To develop instruments that would assist in identifying a potentially effective teacher.

PROCEDURE

Three resources were used to gain the needed data: trainees, instructors, and administrators. Group meetings were held with the trainees where the purposes of the study were explained and written descriptions of the attributes of the effective teacher, as perceived by the trainee, were obtained. These descriptions contained both negative and positive characteristics of each instructor. The method for structuring the atmosphere, plus the anonymity of the questionnaire, contributed to the trainee's desire to respond. However, the trainee's inability to express himself completely in a written fashion necessitated detailed group discussions on the needed qualifications of a hypothetical

teacher of adults. This procedure allowed each trainee to "brainstorm" for those points which he alone felt were important, while the group session allowed him to amplify and expand his ideas using group cues.

Recorded depth interviews were conducted with the instructors using a case history approach. These confidential interviews averaged several hours in length and the tapes were analyzed for characteristics held in common between the instructors. To supplement this, each instructor was asked to provide a written description of a hypothetical person who he thought would have the qualities/characteristics of a basic education teacher for undereducated and unemployed adults. This latter task was also required of the administrators with the added specification that the hypothetical teacher should be one they would seek to hire.

Usable, written descriptions were obtained from eighty-five trainees, seven instructors, and two administrators. This was the entire population when the study was conducted.

RESULTS

The teacher's foremost concern must be the adult student, and his effectiveness in this concern must be judged on his ability to help the student to develop and maintain self-confidence. The ideal teacher could be described as people-oriented, more interested in people than things, more interested in individuality than conformity, and more interested in finding solutions than in following rules. He would be considered a mature, integrated personality that had chosen his own role and relationship to society and coveted for everyone else the same privilege.

Attitudes and skills needed to promote these conditions were reflected in student comments such as, "treated them like a bunch of dirt instead of like people, things we are baby, or comparn with 2 grader." They were also reflected in the teacher's emphasis on the need to maintain and sustain human dignity. Moreover, their importance was clear in the administrator's statement, "give me a teacher with the right attitude, we can take care of the rest!" The attitudes and skills these individuals perceived are described below in rank order.

UNDERSTANDING

It was found that students, teachers and administrators considered understanding to be of critical importance to the effective basic education teacher. Although each group expressed itself somewhat differently, it was clear that this was a characteristic that the teacher must possess. At the same time, it was found that the concept of understanding is composed of many qualities.

Understanding is based upon mutual respect. It is obtained by the instructor who approaches all students on the same basis, forgetting their past inadequacies and starting anew. Preconceived notions must be laid aside so that each student is given an equal chance to be treated with simple human dignity. Such a teacher will not violate the student's sensitivity by cutting him short, looking down on him or appearing distant and untouchable. Instead he is willing to take the time to make a sincere and honest attempt to help. In effect, he will have a genuine liking for people and a desire to see them grow as human beings. In fact, the teacher who simply likes people has taken a

large step forward toward understanding. This is not enough, however, for it was found that the teacher needs an appreciation for individual differences and the inherent worthiness of all people. He must be sensitive to the smallest grain of worth and use it as a beginning of the foundation upon which to build. It is then that the students see value in such a teacher and consider him "one of those who does understand."

It was found that all of the teachers had been through an experience where they learned the real meaning of being rejected or isolated. Many had firsthand experience in the meaning of insecurity, fear, and in several cases, failure. Yet, in all cases they had been able to rise above these experiences. As one teacher said, "I'm not so different from them (students), I just managed to survive." However, understanding is not insured by having experienced conditions similar to those that surround the student, because in becoming a teacher one automatically removes himself from the same frame of reference. Coming from a background similar to the student does provide the teacher with insight, but he still has to listen and hear what the student says.

Understanding requires active involvement in the student's problems, rather than a sense of sympathy. The student does not want sympathy, but a continual and honest effort to understand his feelings, ideas and goals. Moreover, it was found that there is a fine line between being of assistance and becoming over-involved. This does not suggest that the teacher avoids accepting responsibility, but he does so with a critical eye. By becoming over-involved the teacher tends to operate on an emotional plane where he loses all objectivity.

When this happens both he and the student are likely to be hurt. No one is helped and both must lose. Teachers admit that this is easier to say than to do. Nevertheless, they maintain that the teacher does not do something to the student, but with the student and solutions are achieved because of their cooperative efforts.

It is apparent that understanding is dependent upon the learning climate developed by the teacher. He must be able to project faith and confidence in each individual in such a manner that the student perceives a real atmosphere of hope. Students are well aware of their limitations, perhaps too aware, and they do not need to be constantly reminded. In effect, the teacher must constantly transmit optimism and enthusiasm to his students. This assumes that a feeling of trust exists between student and teacher. When the teacher, for example, makes a mistake or is in error,he should be able to admit it rather than try to ignore the fact. There is no point in trying to "out-con" these adult students. They are themselves master manipulators who have learned to expect hypocrisy from education. Therefore, the honest teacher becomes so disarming that the opportunities for real understanding are greatly improved.

The teacher who achieves real understanding is able to provide a learning situation where the student feels he is an integral and needed part. The effective teacher treats him like an adult and recognizes the value of his many contributions. He does not condemn a point of view or sense of values that are different than his own. Instead he tries to understand his adult students by recognizing the merits of their way of life and he may be surprised to find that there are many.

FLEXIBILITY

The instructor needs to respond to momentary changes in such a manner that using a variety of ideas, methods and materials will be considered the standard approach to teaching. It is not unusual to find that materials prepared for a given class are no longer appropriate when the instructor arrives. He must be able to discard one idea in favor of another that is more timely at that particular moment. In this way he can take advantage of events that have practical meaning to the student.

In this setting the teacher needs the ability to play a variety of roles as the changing situation demands. Indeed, these programs cannot be highly structured or regimented and a teacher must have self-confidence in his own ability to make frequent adjustments. In effect, the instructor should be able to perform in an atmosphere where the unexpected is part of the daily routine. In this way he helps the student to learn and make intelligent decisions in a way similar to that which will be encountered in everyday life.

PATIENCE

The instructor needs a capacity for repetition, a willingness to move ahead slowly until the student understands his point. After all, many of these adults have not been a part of the educational process for several years. Furthermore, many have met with constant failure in life and they need to learn in small steps where they can experience success. Time must be taken to listen to the student, talk with him and answer his questions. The effective teacher will take the time to explain the same topic in a variety of ways.

In this setting the teacher needs a fairly even temperament. His behavior should be consistent and not constantly changing depending upon his mood. Such a quality helps in withstanding the intense pressure of student problems, while promoting an objectivity that allows one to really help students to solve their problems. In this connection the instructor who has a do-gooder bent or who feels pity in the plight of the student will not function effectively in this program. In fact the adult basic education student wants a teacher who makes him think and work for himself. In this way they know they are accomplishing something, because both he and the teacher are working together to meet his needs.

Change is a constant, but gradual process that does not occur overnight. On occasion, student actions appear irresponsible or somewhat childish, but the standard methods of correction do not apply. These are not children nor are they retarded. The teacher who is stable and patient will overcome apparent setbacks and see some very dramatic changes.

PRACTICALITY

The teacher should have experienced a wide variety of contacts in our total society so that his frame of reference will be as broad as possible. In this way he can draw from his background materials and experiences that will make learning a meaningful activity to the student. It will also allow the teacher to make use of the student's point of view in relating the subject matter to "us" and "our lives."

It was found that a variety of contacts in the world of work, with different races, with a variety of agencies and institutions, and with values, attitudes and customs of different peoples contributed to the teacher's practical orientation.

It does not appear necessary, however, that he have had prior teaching experience with adults. In fact, experience at any educational level may suffice. The conditions under which he has lived may be much more important. It was found that teachers who had been exposed to the above conditions and contacts were considerably less critical of the students than those who were not so exposed. In fact, such exposure produced broad-minded teachers who accepted students as they are and were, in turn, accepted by the students.

The teacher is more likely to be effective when he presents his subject so that the student can clearly see that what he is learning is something that can be used immediately. If the content seems remote and unrelated to the student's present needs, the teacher will be considerably less effective. These students require immediate material rewards, since they are not symbolically oriented, nor are they accustomed to delayed rewards. In essence, the teacher needs a wide variety of contacts in the total community in order to have a practical grasp of his subject. In this way the basic needs of the student will be emphasized, rather than the status frills or materials that many educators have felt were nice to know. In the final analysis, it is imperative that the student's growth is considered more important than the subject matter. The teacher who is practically oriented will prevent this from happening.

HUMOR

It was found that the teacher must have a sense of humor and the ability to use humor to advantage while teaching. This is an essential quality for the instructor if he is to avoid being overcome by the constant encounter with the complex problems of adults. This setting demands a teacher who can see the humor in events, words and even himself. In fact, through humor the teacher can achieve that all important condition of equating self with the student.

The use of humor requires a fine balance since the teacher must be able to handle some issues with gravity and some with levity. This is a difficult task at best when a wide variety of fairly opinionated students are likely to respond differently to the use of humor in any given situation. Still, he must be able to see the ludicrous under even the most trying circumstance, for in the final analysis it is humor that can provide a refuge for sanity.

CREATIVITY

The teacher needs to be an imaginative individual who enjoys a challenge. In many ways he should be a dreamer who searches for unique or novel solutions in broadening the horizons of the student. After all, he is working with anxious and fearful adults who often underestimate their own ability. They require a classroom that is alive and stimulating where fresh ways of getting the idea across are in constant evidence. After all, such students are already too familiar with the status quo or routine. This approach failed them in the past and they now seek to avoid the herd instinct and emerge as individuals.

The effective teacher must have a wide range of interests and ideas that lead him to try a variety of approaches in his teaching methods and techniques. In fact, he is teaching in an exploratory situation where materials are simply unavailable and he must rely upon his own resources. Since the tried and true does not exist he must be willing to assume responsibilities in areas that may be unfamiliar to him. In so doing he will constantly strive for self-improvement in order to do the best possible job.

In this setting he needs to be willing to take a chance. In fact, it was found that the non-conformist was often the more productive kind of a teacher, because he seemed to enjoy being a part of something that was different and perhaps innovative. Apparently the teacher should not fit the traditional educational system where one does not challenge the usual way of doing things. Instead he needs the mental challenge of producing ideas and methods that can be tried in a new setting. In this way he will have that quality which sets the effective basic education instructor apart.

PREPARATION

Knowledge of the subject matter and how to teach it were stressed by all sources. The teacher who was poorly prepared was of little value in a basic education setting, since his students tend to lose interest and learn slowly. Adult students feel they can immediately identify such a teacher, which in itself would hinder their learning. Students wanted a teacher who was well founded in his subject, knew how to present his material, and knew what aspects were

essential to the adult. It was pointed out that such a teacher could help the student to evaluate himself in terms of his goals and then plan a program to attack his short-comings.

It was also found that the teacher needs to prepare for his assignment by planning. This planning should be in direct response to the student's needs so that a splintering off in all directions can be avoided. This in turn will promote an understanding of what is being taught and why, which is imperative when working with adults. It also allows the teacher to use a variety of techniques in a setting where there is no single most effective technique. Essentially, the teacher needs to plan ahead so that he can stay on the topic and go directly to the point in question. In this way the student can realize maximum participation, while feeling that the instruction is directly related to his individual needs. He knows what to expect from his training as well as what will be required of him.

Students had little patience with laxity in an adult setting. They desire a structured atmosphere where all students are required to work and learn. Differences in instruction should be related to the student's level of ability and their individual goals rather than personality differences. This emphasis should not be construed as meaning that adult students wanted to be pushed or forced to work since this would be self-defeating. A teacher needs to be firm while remembering that he is helping the adult to help himself, allowing him to make his own mistakes and making up his own mind. The effective teacher will also

avoid any attempt to placate the student. Such actions may mislead the teacher but they certainly don't fool the adult student.

It was found that the prepared teacher could be described as a persistent achiever, a person who continually sought self-improvement as well as student improvement. He was a person who was not satisfied until he had done his very best. Moreover, he saw in basic education an opportunity to assist the student to make significant achievements. He felt a personal need to contribute something of value to the student in particular and society as a whole. It was found that the effective teacher considered anything less as unsatisfactory.

TEACHER SELECTION

The total findings from this study were used to design an interview schedule that would assist in screening potential teachers as well as gaining insight about existing members of the basic education staff. The first part of the schedule seeks background information on work experience, travel and training beyond that normally required. The major emphasis occurs in the second part where an attempt is made to identify the necessary teacher characteristics through the applicant's attitude. The measurement of attitude is accomplished by the applicant's reaction to set situations and his response to a series of position statements. All items are intended to reflect the characteristics needed by an effective basic education teacher.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The characteristics needed by an ideal basic education teacher have a variety of component parts. They are similar to the parts of a mosaic where some parts can be taught while others are more readily acquired through the process of maturation. Moreover, the need for these characteristics will occur at varying degrees on both horizontal and vertical planes within the mosaic. This produces an overlapping condition where one essential quality is dependent upon each of the other qualities.
2. It is unlikely that any given instructor could possess all of the characteristics needed in teaching adults basic education. A balance, however, among members of the staff can be achieved.
3. The attributes needed by the effective teacher are derived from a single goal -- the ability to help the student to develop and maintain self-confidence. The essential attributes to reach this goal in order of their importance were: Understanding, Flexibility, Patience, Practicality, Humor, Creativity, and Preparation.
4. Understanding that reflects the inherent worth of every individual, emphasizing active involvement in student problems rather than sympathy leads to a learning climate where the student feels he is an integral and needed part. This is the foremost requirement for the effective adult basic education teacher.

5. There is very little difference between the characteristics needed by the adult basic education teacher and the effective teacher in any other setting. On the other hand, they must be present in the basic education setting, while teachers in other programs may not possess such characteristics and the programs still manage to survive.